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SUBJECT: CZECH GREENS: PROMOTION TO TOP LEVEL OF NATIONAL
POLITICS MEANS COMPROMISES, BUT ALSO LASTING GAINS

REF: PRAGUE 122

11. (U) SUMMARY. The Czech Green Party, in government for the first time ever, is exercising an influence far beyond its 3% share in parliament as it rapidly evolves from a coffee house movement to a mainstream political party. The party, which is wrestling with the tensions between its historic activist ideals and the real life demands of political compromise, will hold its annual party congress February 17-18. Party Chairman Martin Bursik, who has so far kept the party together in spite of both internal debates and fundamental policy differences between the Greens and their coalition partners, is expected to be confirmed as party leader for another year. The positions taken at the Congress, on issues ranging from missile defense to ethics in government and European integration, will also tell us something about the direction the party, now the nation's fastest growing political grouping, plans to take over the next year. END SUMMARY

12. (U) In last June's general election, the Green Party won slightly more than 6% of the vote nationwide and received, because of the modified D'hondt system of proportional representation, just 6 of the 200 seats in parliament. Chairman Martin Bursik said soon after the election that the party would not surrender its principles and join a coalition "at any cost" just to get a share of power. But the Greens eventually agreed to join the coalition with Prime Minister Topolánek's Civic Democrats (ODS) and now find themselves governing with two partners they have many disagreements with. The upcoming Congress will be the first demonstration of just how much support the rank and file are still prepared to give Bursik, and whether complaints that he has gone too far on some important issues are isolated or serious enough to force Bursik back to traditional Green positions.

PARTY'S GROWING INFLUENCE IN DIVIDED COALITION

13. (U) As recently as late 2006, any observer would have predicted that the Christian Democrats, an established fixture on the political scene, would have had significantly greater influence than the Greens in a three-way coalition with ODS. But due to the fact that the Christian Democrats are, at least temporarily, preoccupied with the indictment on a bribery charge of the party Chairman, Jiri Cunek (Reftel), the Green Party has been able to push forward more of its own agenda, thereby exercising an influence far beyond its size. For example, the cabinet's agenda on February 5 had 27 items on it. Sixteen of those had been submitted by ministers from the Green Party. KDU-CSL, on the other hand, submitted only three of the items.

14. (U) Since the Greens have positions on several issues that differ fundamentally from the positions of its coalition

partners, it is still unclear just how much influence they can have. Will the Greens stick to their long-held positions and demand their partners show flexibility or will the Greens have to accommodate their partners and show flexibility themselves? The coalition is still in its early days, but so far it seems that the Greens are getting their way on some issues by showing flexibility on others. For example, the Greens have always stood for transparency and honesty in government. Yet the current minority government was only able to pass its vote of confidence after dealing privately with two renegades from the opposition Social Democrats. In addition, the coalition's number two, Principal Deputy Prime Minister Jiri Cunek, was indicted February 9 on a charge of accepting a bribe. Bursik's reaction was to say that if a member of the Greens were in a similar position, he would ask them to step down. But he has pointedly not called for Cunek to resign. The Greens, who have actively campaigned on behalf of minority rights, also dislike Cunek because he forcefully evicted Roma families from the center of the town of which he was once Mayor. Green Minister without Portfolio Džamila Stehliková, in office only since the start of the year, has made a promising start on the issue of Roma rights. But neither coalition partner has come forward with much in the way of support and realists, pointing out that there are very few votes to be won in defending Roma, wonder how much will be achieved in the end.

15. (U) Another issue that is forcing the party to bend its principles is the question of European integration. The Greens are strong proponents of multilateral cooperation across Europe. But the coalition's senior partner, the Civic Democrats, are Eurosceptics. Prime Minister Topolánek has just appointed MEP Jan Zahradil (ODS) to lead talks on the EU constitution. Zahradil and Bursik clashed last month when Zahradil, following his own party's position, rejected a

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German proposal to revive the previously tabled constitution and Bursik argued that the Czech government hasn't yet even formulated its policy on the issue.

16. (SBU) A third issue forcing party leaders to show flexibility is the proposal to construct a U.S. radar base on Czech soil. ODS and KDU-CSL are strong supporters of the proposal. But many of the Green Party's grass roots supporters have complained that Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, selected by the Greens, has been too vocal in his support of the base. On February 7, 2007, Matej Stropnický, one of the party's 54 member party council, sent a letter to party leaders, signed by more than 20 other members of the council, saying Schwarzenberg was undoubtedly a good man, but that his foreign policy conflicts with the party's program. Stropnický has also said that he will introduce a resolution at the party congress calling for the party to support a referendum on the issue. But Ondřej Liška, the young Chairman of parliament's EU Affairs Committee, argues that calls for a referendum are pointless because any bill authorizing such a referendum would never get past the ODS-dominated Senate and lower house. On a February 11 television talk show, Bursik predicted that the party congress would insist that the Greens press the coalition government to get a "guarantee" from the U.S. that the proposed missile defense system would one day be brought under NATO operation and command. Meanwhile, Liška is scheduled to go to the U.S. February 25 to March 1 to discuss missile defense with American counterparts. Liška has, in the past, told the Embassy on several occasions that he does not expect to support the proposal for a U.S. radar base, but now seems to be keeping the door open until more details are known about the base and its possible integration into a NATO defense system.

BURSIK STRAYING FROM ACTIVIST BASE?

17. (U) A number of prominent Greens and media commentators have noticed that Bursik has gone back on stands taken

earlier. One party member, former Human Rights Commissioner, anti-Communist dissident and professional gadfly Petr Uhl, quit the party in January, 2007, stating in an open letter to the party that the current government is the product of political corruption, based on fraud. He added the Greens' participation in the coalition conflicts with the party's basic principles of openness, transparency, and political honesty. Uhl also took the party's leadership to task for supporting U.S. foreign policy and not promoting a referendum on the missile base proposal, a position that had been adopted earlier by the party council.

18. (U) A February 12 editorial in the national daily Pravo made similar points, arguing that Bursik has zigzagged on the referendum issue and modified his stance on Missile Defense from firmly opposing anything that wasn't part of an existing NATO system to possibly accepting a facility that would be linked to a NATO system sometime in the future. (The Ambassador will meet with Bursik February 15 to discuss his positions, to be reported Septel).

PARTY'S GROWING STRENGTH

19. (SBU) COMMENT. The Green Party has been polling as high as 13% and regularly above 10%, usually the 4th strongest party, just behind the Communists, which have roughly 75,000 members. At the time of last June's elections, the Greens had slightly more than 500 members but now claim nearly 3,000. The growing popularity of the party across a broad range of the general public coincides with the growing criticisms by the party's initial activist base. Bursik, who will run unopposed for post of Party Chairman at this weekend's Congress, has regularly demonstrated good political skills. He might lose a few zealots along the way, but it looks as though he is building the party into a lasting and influential force with a much broader and more stable base. Such a development will mean compromises on some issues that matter to the U.S. such as transparency and minority rights. But it could also be to America's benefit if it means a more moderate stance with regard to a possible U.S. radar base in the Czech Republic.

GRABER